

National Charter Schools Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC)

New Leaders for New Schools (New Leaders) designed the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) to identify and provide incentives to school leaders and practitioners who have implemented effective practices that help drive student achievement gains and who are willing to share those practices with educators across the country. New Leaders has partnered with Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) to identify the participating charter schools that have made the highest student achievement gains based on value-added analyses that compare student-level data across states. New Leaders is partnering with SchoolWorks to lead a rigorous process aimed at uncovering effective practices; the process begins with a self-study conducted by the school and culminates in the production of text-based and multimedia cases from schools making the highest gains.

Needs Assessment Results and General Information

Over 100 charter schools are participating in EPIC, from 18 states nationwide and the District of Columbia. For the first year of awards, approximately 65 percent of the students in the participating schools were eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Charter schools in high-need areas tend to have more new teachers than their district counterparts and a high rate of teacher and principal turnover. Therefore, it is the goal of EPIC to support both retention and recruitment of high quality teachers in the charter schools in the grant.

Background

Like other award models, the EPIC model of incentive pay recognizes the paramount importance of student

achievement performance in evaluating educators. Additionally, it is predicated on the belief that those who are seeing gains in achievement should make their practices public and allow colleagues to learn from them. Given the lack of time and lack of research-based systems in place to capture and share their successes, many charter schools work in isolation. By providing incentives and, through a highly structured, thoughtful process of documentation, New Leaders is taking the lessons learned by educators in schools with high achievement gains across the country and sharing them with the broader education community. The cases produced through EPIC serve as a powerful professional development platform for schools interested in strengthening their practices and improving their performance.

LOCATION(S)	99 charter schools in 18 states and Washington, DC, including: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin.
AWARD DATE	November 2006
DURATION	5 years
PARTNERS	New Leaders for New Schools; Mathematica Policy Research (MPR); NewSchools Venture Fund; national charter schools and charter school networks, including Accelerated Charter Schools, Aspira Charter Schools, Aspire Public Schools, BrightStar Network, Cesar Chavez School Network, Charter Schools USA, Chicago Charter School Foundation, Envision Schools, Friendship Public Schools, IDEA Public Schools, Imagine Schools, Inner City Education Foundation, Maya Angelou Public Charter Schools, National Heritage Charter Schools, Noble Network of Charter Schools, Perspectives Charter Schools, Propel Schools, South Texas Educational Technologies, St. Hope Schools, University of Chicago Charter Schools, and Victory Schools.

Incentives

Through the EPIC value-added model, highest gain schools are identified as “Gold-gain” schools, and the high-gain schools as “Silver-gain” schools. All instructional staff in Gold-gain schools receive \$4,000, while Silver-gain school instructional staff receive \$3,000. Principals and assistant principals in Gold-gain schools receive awards of \$12,000 and \$8,000, respectively, and in Silver-gain award schools \$8,000 and \$5,000, respectively. Individual teachers in Gold-gain schools will be eligible for Spotlight Teacher awards. Principals and Spotlight Teachers will be identified based on school- and classroom-level achievement gains. Only those who are open to sharing effective practices and who are willing to work with New Leaders to document these practices will be eligible to receive an award.

Evaluation

New Leaders has partnered with MPR to develop and conduct an extensive evaluation of the EPIC program. This evaluation will address both the incentive and effective practice components of EPIC. The research questions related to the incentive component of EPIC will include:

- What impact does eligibility for EPIC incentive awards have on student achievement?
- How aware are principals and teachers of EPIC’s performance-based incentives?
- What successes and challenges were encountered in the implementation of the incentive award components of EPIC?

The research questions related to the effective practice component of EPIC will include:

- Does EPIC appear to affect educational practices?
- How do EPIC Effective Practice Teams identify and disseminate effective practices?
- What successes and challenges were encountered in the implementation of the effective practice component of EPIC?

The evaluation will use administrative and achievement data on students and staff and will include staff surveys and case studies. Case studies will focus on the whole school and include interviews with leaders and staff, as well as classroom observations of spotlighted teachers.

Resources

Grant funding was awarded at a level of 62 percent of the projected program costs, including performance/practice incentives. In addition to the Teacher Incentive Fund grant, New Leaders and the National Charter School Consortium will match over \$3.3 million. New Leaders has secured \$9.3 million in private support for the EPIC program nationally.

Data Systems

The limitations of charter schools’ data warehousing systems or, in some cases, the lack of them altogether make collecting student and teacher data from the schools challenging. Therefore, we have put the following processes in place for Year 3 in order to reduce the burden of the data collection and submission process as much as possible for schools: 1) schools and CMOs were given detailed instructions on what data New Leaders and MPR need and how to submit them, 2) we created templates and samples of those templates to show exactly how data should be entered, 3) we will be holding conference calls to specifically address data questions with schools, and 4) we are requesting data from states, districts, and associations directly in order to eliminate the data collection burden from some charter schools entirely.

Year 2 Activities

The second year of EPIC saw the successful pilot of a complete cycle of the EPIC program in the 99 schools that made up the National Charter School Consortium. More than 500 educators from 22 of the highest gain elementary, middle, and high school charter schools were awarded over \$1.15 million. The program cycle

included recruiting over 145 schools into the consortium, of which 99 met the requirements to be part of the award analysis; creating the value-added model (with Mathematica) to compare gains across schools in 18 states and the District of Columbia and subsequently identifying those schools with the highest level of gain; creating the processes for and then awarding eligible educators within these schools; creating, testing, and revising the protocol for identifying effective practices (with SchoolWorks) and then documenting these practices in differentiated formats, including rich video treatments and written case study methods; and developing approaches to professional development within schools and CMOs to encourage use of practices available via the EPIC online knowledge system.

Evaluation work was also launched in Year 2 with a Mathematica-designed survey of 150 principals and assistant principals. Finally, after developing expected “use case” scenarios, research, testing, piloting and site build out were completed for the first iteration of the EPIC online knowledge system.

Outlook for Year 3

After launching the EPIC online knowledge system at the end of Year 2, New Leaders will begin Year 3 by completing the effective practices identification and documentation processes for the remaining Year 2

award-recognized schools and then populate the system with the 62 effective practices from these charter schools and award-recognized schools from our partner districts across the nation. In this third grant year, the scope of our charter school EPIC program will include 100 schools, including new member schools, and will provide financial incentives for principals, assistant principals, and all instructional staff. We will add the “Spotlight Teacher” award category to identify, make awards to, and learn from teachers who are identified as driving the highest level of classroom gains in their awarded schools. In March 2009, New Leaders expects to award educators from an estimated 24 schools over \$2.1 million, with a remaining amount of approximately \$200,000 to be paid out after principals, assistant principals, and Spotlight Teachers complete their effective practice documentation work. Of note, the disparity in the original award level model between awards for school leaders and teachers has been significantly narrowed for Year 3. We will continue to identify and document effective practices from this coming year’s award winners and begin providing professional development opportunities and support via our online knowledge system to help more educators and schools succeed and so qualify for these awards. Additionally, Mathematica will begin visiting EPIC-eligible charter schools to write case studies as a part of our program evaluation.